

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 08 TEL AVIV 006615

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1. Upcoming Israeli Elections](#)
- [2. Israel-Hizbullah Clashes](#)
- [3. American Jewry](#)

Key stories in the media:

All media led with the upcoming elections. Leading media reported that President Moshe Katsav announced that he will sign an executive order to dissolve the Knesset and call early elections on March 28, 2006 according to a compromise reached late Tuesday night. This morning, Israel Radio reported that the possibility still exists that the Knesset, not the President, might vote its dissolution. Israel Radio reported that today, the Knesset's House Committee approved the division of the Likud into two Knesset factions -- the Likud and PM Sharon's "National Responsibility," which will comprise 14 Knesset members. Maariv reported that Sharon will determine the composition of his party and the order of its candidates. All media reported that on Tuesday, Binyamin Netanyahu called Sharon a "dictator" and his family a "crime family." Major media reported that the Likud cabinet ministers decided on Tuesday not to quit the government until the election of the party's chairman. Yediot reported that Likud activists on the ground are not following Sharon. On the other hand, The Jerusalem Post quoted Vice PM Ehud Olmert as saying on Tuesday that Likud mayors across the country would be supporting Sharon and his new party. Ha'aretz reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and FM Silvan Shalom plan to make an attack on Binyamin Netanyahu's economic policy the focus of their campaigns for the leadership of the Likud Party. In Yediot's lead story, Mofaz was quoted as saying that he, not Netanyahu, can lead the Likud to victory. Yediot and Israel Radio quoted Shalom as making similar remarks about himself.

Israel Radio reported that Shimon Peres will tell Labor Party Chairman at their meeting scheduled for today that he will continue his political activity in the party, but that he will not ask for a secure place in the party's list of candidates for the next Knesset. The radio reported that Peres told his associates that he would be able to continue his activity for peace in extra-parliamentary arenas.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Eyal Arad, a top Sharon political strategist, told the newspaper on Tuesday that Sharon will not -- before the upcoming elections -- define which settlements he envisions as part of the settlement blocs that Israel will ultimately annex.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Tuesday, PA officials who have been closely watching the latest political crisis in Israel expressed fear that Sharon might exploit the situation to step up pressure on the Palestinians. However, the newspaper wrote that others

voiced optimism, saying that the new Israeli government would have no choice but to revive the stalled peace process. The Jerusalem Post also reported that PA National Security Adviser Jibril Rajoub told the newspaper on Tuesday that Sharon's move to the center was "better late than never" and that it is a "good and positive development." Leading media reported that on Tuesday, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called Sharon to wish him good luck in his new course.

All Israeli TV stations broadcast footage initially shown on Al Manar-TV, Hizbullah's station, which exhibited Hizbullah's direct hits on Israeli Merkava tanks on Monday. Israeli TV commentators and IDF sources criticized the IDF's handling of the Hizbullah attack. Maariv cited the anger of Israeli political sources over UNIFIL failure to stop the Hizbullah attack. Israel Radio reported that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan strongly condemned Hizbullah over the attack and said that Lebanon bore responsibility for it. The radio reported that France has presented a draft resolution at the UN Security Council that includes the condemnation of IAF strikes on Hizbullah outposts, and that Algeria, a member of the Council, blames Israel for the incidents. Israel Radio reported that the U.S. wants to remove Israel's name from the condemnation. Israel Radio cited Al Manar-TV as saying that this morning, IAF planes dropped leaflets on Beirut, telling Lebanese citizens that Hizbullah causes significant damage to Lebanon. The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel has once again asked the EU to blacklist Hizbullah.

Israel Radio cited the Egyptian daily Al-Ahram as saying the PA Civilian Affairs Minister Muhammad Dahlan is leaving for Cairo for talks on the opening of the Rafah border crossing slated for Friday. Israel Radio reported on talks on the border crossings, which were held last night and will resume tonight. Those talks are conducted by teams headed by Amos Gilad, head of the Defense Ministry's political bureau, Dahlan, and U.S. Ambassador to Israel Richard Jones. Yediot quoted a "senior U.S. source" as saying that the U.S. administration encourages PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas to take steps that will demonstrate his commitment to disarm the Palestinian terror organizations. However, the source was quoted as saying that the U.S. understands that the disarming of Hamas is not realistic at this time, but that the U.S. does not understand why the PA does not act against Islamic Jihad, which the source defines as a small group lacking support. The source was further quoted as saying that the U.S. has expressed to Abbas its disappointment over the fact that he does not deal with Islamic Jihad, and that it has asked him to act.

Ha'aretz reported that the Justice Ministry and security officials have rejected several fundamental recommendations of the Sasson report on illegal outposts, which are meant to prevent more outposts from being established and impose deterrent sentences on those who establish them.

Ha'aretz reported that the European Union has prepared a harsh report on Israel's activity in East Jerusalem, but that it has decided to delay its release in the wake of the recent warming of ties between Israel and the EU.

Ha'aretz reported that the 350 housing units in Ma'aleh Adumim for which the Construction and Housing Ministry will publish tenders on Thursday, will be located within the city's existing built-up areas, and will therefore not expand its boundaries.

Ha'aretz reported that at a press conference held Tuesday, Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies presented its annual report, which determines that the strategic balance in the Middle East clearly favors Israel.

Maariv reported that on Tuesday, at Maariv's financial conference, Peres called on the EU to include several Middle East Countries including Israel and the PA, in the Eurozone (the group of countries that use the Euro) in order to "privatize peace."

1. Upcoming Israeli Elections:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "If Sharon wins,

the Americans will want to see him forming a coalition with the parties on the left.... They will prefer such a coalition out of a hope that in future, when the opportunity arises, it will be more amenable to negotiations, easier to maneuver."

Senior op-ed writer Uzi Benziman commented in Ha'aretz: "Throughout his entire life, Sharon has destroyed his undertakings.... The reason given for all of these acts of destruction was national responsibility -- a reason that did not rid Sharon's colleagues of the feeling that Sharon was betraying them."

Columnist Avraham Tirosh wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Disengagement from the Likud ... opens up a window of opportunity for a possible coalition with Amir Peretz and the Labor Party that would progress rapidly towards a peace accord."

Block Quotes:

I. "Bush Is Not a Likudnik"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (November 23): In the meantime, from an American perspective, the elections in Israel, interesting as they might be, are merely a footnote to the political process overtaking the Middle East. And if you want to rank American priorities, you can do so by date: first of all the elections in Iraq, which will have the greatest impact on the American political standing of the President of the U.S.; then the elections in the Palestinian Authority -- which, as usual, will also bear no small potential for influence on the results in Israel; and only afterward Sharon-Peretz-Netanyahu."

II. "Ambiguous National Responsibility"

Senior op-ed writer Uzi Benziman commented in Ha'aretz (November 23): "The enthusiasm surrounding Ariel Sharon's decision to leave the Likud blurs one's vision; the Prime Minister has not presented a clear political policy and has not given convincing ideological reasons for establishing a new party. All he said at the Monday night press conference was 'Life in the Likud has become unbearable' and 'The Likud in its present form cannot lead Israel to its national goals.' What those goals are and how Sharon plans to reach them -- the answers to these questions remain in the realm of the unknown.... One of the Likud's failures was its ideological obfuscation; what, therefore, is the advantage of the new party, if it repeats the faults of the mother party? In addition, the public deserves the truth so that it can decide among clear alternatives. Throughout his entire life, Sharon has destroyed his undertakings.... The reason given for all of these acts of destruction was national responsibility -- a reason that did not rid Sharon's colleagues of the feeling that Sharon was betraying them."

III. "Sharon-Peretz: A Winning Team"

Columnist Avraham Tirosh wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (November 23): "[Sharon's] quitting the Likud and running at the head of a new party is the only chance for continued progress with the peace process in the framework of the road map, which will lead to a final status arrangement. That is the most important aspect of the step Sharon took. The very fact of that act proves to anyone who still harbored any doubt that the prime minister is serious and sincere about achieving his goal of reaching a final status agreement, in the wake of which Israel will position itself along its new borders of the Green Line plus the settlement blocs that abut it, with a sovereign, Palestinian state at its side. Those are Israel's 'national goals,' as Sharon put it in his statement on Monday, to which the Likud is incapable of leading Israel any longer. A Sharon-Peretz coalition would be capable of so doing.... While disengagement from the Likud reduces Sharon's chance of winning the elections -- Tuesday's polls notwithstanding -- it opens up a window of opportunity for a possible coalition with Amir Peretz and the Labor Party that would progress rapidly towards a peace accord.... Against all [the odds] is the fact that [Sharon] is going into this current battle from the prime minister's seat, and mainly the fact of his demonstrable leadership and his proven ability to lead the country to difficult but essential crossroads, as shown by disengagement. That is the leadership that Israel needs now, and Sharon has an advantage over both Netanyahu and Peretz in that field. This might lead to his victory at the ballot

boxes and to the establishment of a Sharon-Peretz coalition, which will only do Israel good."

12. Israel-Hizbullah Clashes:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Restraint only makes sense if Israel is 'paid' for it in the form of concrete actions that more effectively safeguard our security."

Block Quotes:

"Hitting Hizbullah"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (November 23): "Israel responded with bombardments against Hizbullah's bases, but has not directly attacked the interests of the capitals it has held responsible -- namely, Beirut, Damascus, and Teheran. The question is whether such restraint on Israel's part, in the face of what the United States has rightly condemned as an 'unprovoked attack,' is wise. Once again, Israel seems to be acting by the old 'rules' that were supposed to have been changed by the withdrawal from southern Lebanon behind a UN-recognized border. According to the new rules, Israel would not retaliate tit-for-tat in the case of Hizbullah attacks, but would act directly against the interests of responsible governments in Lebanon, Syria or Iran.... Restraint for its own sake, as we should have learned by now, is worse than useless: it simply invites further and perhaps more deadly attacks. Restraint only makes sense if Israel is 'paid' for it in the form of concrete actions that more effectively safeguard our security.... The international pressure that has been building on Syria should only increase in response to that regime's resort, once again, to proxy aggression against Israel. Syria must learn that its only way out is to abandon the path of aggression and terror, rather than returning to its old-style intimidation tactics. It is appropriate that Israel act in-sync with the international community in increasing this pressure now that, finally, our concerns have become more widely shared. But such cooperation must be a results-oriented, two-way street."

13. American Jewry:

Summary:

Jonathan S. Tobin, executive editor of The Jewish Exponent in Philadelphia, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "As the war [in Iraq] drags on and Sept. 11 recedes further into the background, Jews' insecurity about their place in American society and their nightmares about their Christian neighbors -- even if unjustified -- may have a greater impact on their votes than anything Islamists do."

Block Quotes:

"Jewish American Agenda"

Jonathan S. Tobin, executive editor of The Jewish Exponent in Philadelphia, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (November 23): "Republicans were able to gain a crucial few percentage points of Jewish votes in 2004 based on the perception of strong Republican support for Israel. Also key to that gain was the notion that an administration fighting aggressively against Islamist terror would make the world a safer place for Jews. As long as Jews fear al-Qaida and its Palestinian allies more than the conservative Christians, the Republicans have a fighting chance to win a larger share of Jewish votes. But if the bulk of these voters still fear that Bush's conservative Christian allies are out to turn them into second-class citizens, then the Democrats win. Republicans can argue that the fears they seek to exploit are more immediate and represent a greater threat to Israel and Western civilization itself. But as the war drags on and Sept. 11 recedes further into

the background, Jews' insecurity about their place in American society and their nightmares about their Christian neighbors -- even if unjustified -- may have a greater impact on their votes than anything Islamists do."

JONES